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Klimczuk, Andrzej

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WARNER, MALCOLM (ED.) (2013), THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE WORKPLACE. ABINGDON: ROUTLEDGE.

Reviewed by Andrzej KLIMCZUK*

This volume is a re-issue of the book published nearly 40 years ago. Although it is an edition without revised and new chapters, it has been re-released as a part of the “Routledge Library Editions: Organizations” series which aims to present major works of leading experts in their field. However, the book does not include any information why it was re-released.

The book contains 11 chapters, both empirical and theoretical. The editor Malcolm Warner assumes that the analysis of industrial relations needs an interdisciplinary approach to describe the complex characteristics of workplace activities and to illustrate the potentiality of this approach in conflict resolution in the workplace. Papers included in the volume were written by scholars whose research was focused on industrial sociology (such as “Technology and Other Variables: Some Current Approaches in Organization Theory” by Celia Davies, Sandra Dawson and Arthur Francis), psychology (“A Behavioural Analysis of Bargaining” by Andrew W. Gottschalk), and anthropology (“Chance, Punters and the Fiddle: Institutionalized Pilferage in a Hotel Dining Room” by Gerald Mars).

Warner also indicated that the primary objective of the volume was to show the current state of research on bargaining, practical application of social science in industry, as well as the diversity of research and methods of social study. However, nearly half of chapters are focused on industrial relations (“Research into Workplace Industrial Relations: Progress and Prospects” by Stanley Parker; “Sociological Imagination and Industrial Life” by John E. T. Eldridge; “Industrial Conflict Revisited” by Warner; and “Cheap at Twice the Price? Shop Stewards and Workshop Relations in Engineering” by Edward Owen Evans) and organization studies (“Perceptions, the ‘Principle of Cumulation’ and the Supply of Labour” by

* Andrzej KLIMCZUK, Warsaw School of Economics, Poland, aklimczuk@gazeta.pl

Dan Gowler and Karen Legge; “The Task Analysis Framework in Organizational Analysis” by Peter Abell and David Mathew; and “Computers and Supervisors” by Keith E. Thurley). These chapters are entirely based on the British experience. In other words, this volume may still present even more interdisciplinary, international and intercultural approaches.

The chapters of this book may be divided into three categories. For reasons of space, we will mention here just a few contributions. The first group of chapters is related to socioeconomic changes of the 70s. Parker in his chapter presents conclusions of an official government survey (such as the significant role of shop stewards in negotiations with local management, the growth of informal practices in management) that inspires the study of industrial relations at the workplace. He also proposed macro and micro models of industrial relations (including such variables as organization characteristics, quality of industrial relations, outside influences, attitudes of the parties) that still can be adapted to analyzing more flexible work arrangements. Warner focuses more on the societal context of industrial relations by showing how endemic conflict and reliance on economic variables were underestimated and can be valid only under such conditions as a free-market economy and a democratic political system.

A few chapters focus on human behavior in organizations. For example, Gowler and Legge described a “regressive spiral” in the labour market. They show the factors that push employees into and out of the organization, as well as that attitudes to a wage payment system differ in case of manual workers, leisure industry, and public service. Authors’ propose models of occupational role of differentiation and integration (which suggest that lack of change and routinization of job requirements leads to integrate an occupational role), as well as of labour mobility (showing that role integration leads to an unwillingness to change labour). Another study by Earl Hopper and Adam Pearce (“Relative Deprivation, Occupational Status, and Occupational ‘Situs’: The Theoretical and Empirical Application of a Neglected Concept”) continued a survey of 183 men from England and Wales to describe how personal and interpersonal factors influence job participation. It is important to underline that they used an almost completely forgotten concept of “occupational situs” that refers to the differentiation of occupation categories by any number of criteria other than or besides economic and status values in criteria, such as “indoor” versus “outdoor” work, contact with people, etc.

A third group of chapters show skepticism related to rise of post-industrial economy. Davies, Dawson, and Francis propose a thesis that still can be used by critics of technology: technological determinism does not allow predicting

behavior of employees. Instead, organizational theory needs complex models, in which technology were a significant part of a variety of other variables, remaining relevant. Abell and Mathew continue the discussion by arguing that “task decomposition structures” related to using new technologies are not sufficient for explaining the organizational structure. They propose the redefining of these concepts, such as task and output uncertainty, using computers in supervisory functions, and control surveillance.

The studies included in this book can still be important, especially in the growing in importance after 2007-2008 financial crisis context of reindustrialisation discourse that focuses on re-establishing of industries that may improve the balance of trade and generate more socially and economically desirable jobs than the service, creative, and finance sectors. The book shows how important were institutionalized relations and conflicts between management and employees that are nowadays avoided with the rise of human resource management practices and the individualization of contracts. This volume should be particularly interesting for researchers interested in historical changes for the study of the workplace, organizational studies, for the importance of technology in industry, and for the study of labour unions.